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Senior Research Staff on International Communism

THE EUROPEAN SATELLITES AND THE SINO-SOVIET DIFFERENCES

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THE EUROPEAN SATELLITES AND THE SINO-SOVIET DIFFERENCES

The emergence of conflicting Russian and Chinese views on the correct application of Lenin's teachings to the current international situation raises the question what effect this development is likely to have on the third major component of the "Socialist Commonwealth," the European People's Democracies, or to be more exact, on their communist rulers.

To answer this question we must necessarily proceed from certain assumptions as to human motives in general and communist mental processes in particular, checked against the available record of past behavior.

We may assume that the key to the motivation of Satellite leaders is the same as that ascribed in 1939 by Churchill to the Russians in a famous speech: self-interest. In the case of the Satellite leaders the further problem of defining what they regard as their overriding interest is simplified by the absence of complicating factors such as "great power chauvinism" or eventual messianic velleities. At any rate altriustic motives are not likely to be any more decisive for a Novotny, Gheorghiu-Dej, or Kadar, than they are for a veteran communist like Tito, who with complete candor, recently claimed that "sometimes, we actually subordinate our own interests to the interests of mankind and the interests of peace."[1] Since mankind includes the Yugoslavs, and peace presumably benefits them too, allowing these general interests to prevail "sometimes" over purely selfish interests hardly stamps the policy of communist Yugoslavia as altruistic, rather the opposite.

[1] Speech in Belgrade, October 12. FBIS, October 13, 1960.

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There can be only one answer to the question, what the communist leaders must be presumed to regard as their permanent interest: retention and increase of their power. This does not necessarily preclude an element of messianism, for they may also believe, either sincerely or by auto-suggestion, that communism is good for their compatriots and that they are the best equipped to apply it in their country. As Brzezinski aptly put it: "A sense of self-righteousness tied to historical inevitability can have an enduring attraction, particularly to the self-educated."[1] Some of the leaders may at any rate soothe eventual qualms with the thought that the present world situation being what it is, the Satellite countries simply have no choice and must make the best of it.

Since power means domination over others and a degree of freedom from domination by others (relaying another's orders provides no gratification for the ego) satisfaction of the thirst for power has a dual aspect. The aim of the Satellite leaders must be to balance the need to obey the dictates of the Kremlin, by whose grace they hold office and their own desire for as much freedom of action, that is, for as much real power as possible.* The limits of their field of maneuver are necessarily narrow, for they are caught in a vicious circle: they need Soviet support because they are unpopular, and the more obvious their subservience to the USSR, the greater their unpopularity.

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[1] The Soviet Bloc. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1960: p. 334.

* It is true Gomulka came to power without Soviet help, just the opposite, but whether he could have retained power for very long against continued Soviet hostility is very doubtful.

However conditions are not quite the same in all the Satellites. The solidity of the various regimes is a function of a number of factors, internal as well as external. Among the former, the most important are the popular attitude toward communism, the strength of anti-Russian feeling, the strength of the Communist party and the quality of leadership of its "cadre." Among the latter are the raison d'état, that is the need to rely on Soviet support to defend the country's territorial integrity, the geographical location with regard to the USSR and other military powers, and the need for raw materials and economic assistance. The Satellites are no exception to the rule that the only chance for the heads of small countries to enjoy any real freedom of action is offered by the possibility of playing one great power against another - provided, however, that their governments have the minimum stability needed to stand on their own feet without continuous and direct support from an immediate and powerful neighbor.

If this be true, the only possibility for the Satellite leaders to extend their freedom of action, i.e., their power, lies in the exploitation of the disruptive elements inherent in a grouping containing two great imperialist powers, the USSR and Communist China.

This does not, of course, mean that the Satellite regimes would welcome an open break between the two, since that would weaken the Communist Bloc and therefore seriously jeopardize their own chances of survival. However, the emergence and survival of a Chinese counterweight to Moscow's exclusive predominance, which would put them in the happy position of the tertius gaudens, would be a different matter. One can think, furthermore, of specific reasons why the Chinese point of view should seem attractive to the Satellite leaders.

In the first place, Communist China, all disparity in size notwithstanding, started essentially as "one of us" from the Satellite point of view. China's successful assertion of a mind of her own could not help but be gratifying to her fellows. At the same time it supplied some oxygen to the expiring ghost of the "different roads to socialism" principle. In the second place, the position of China - which had frowned upon de-Stalinization from its start in 1956 - was bound to awaken a sympathetic response in the Satellite apparatchiki, since Stalinism without Stalin meant greater power for all of them. Lastly, one of the planks in the Chinese platform is opposition to indiscriminate Soviet economic support of uncommitted countries. Why should Moscow risk squandering precious resources on doubtful prospects offering no guarantees of staying bought, when they could be so much more safely and profitably invested in the family?

But tempting as it must have been to support the Chinese - with due discretion of course - there were a number of things to be considered. To begin with, it can be assumed that atheism does not enjoin communists to repudiate such aphorisms as "unto everyone that hath, shall be given . . . but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath." So with the Satellite regimes. Clearly, as far as intrinsic stability is concerned, some of them "have," and some "have not," and the latter are so weak that no amount of moral support from a country as distant as China could prevent their collapse. They need constant solid support from the neighboring Soviet Union, and incurring Soviet hostility would be quite preposterous. For these regimes there can be no question of increasing their power by foreign political maneuvers.

The most common source of weakness in the Satellite regimes is evidently popular hostility both to communism and to the Russians, the rule of which the local Communist party personifies. As far as communism is concerned,

the only people who may not be overwhelmingly opposed to it are the Czechs - but not the Slovaks. As far as attitudes toward the Russians are concerned, the feelings vary from the outspoken hostility, for historic reasons, of their immediate neighbors, the Poles and the Romanians, as well as of the Hungarians, to the antipathy any foreign master is bound to inspire even among former friends, such as the Czechs and the Bulgarians, let alone neutrals such as the Albanians.

Other factors affecting the degree of necessary subservience of the Satellite regimes to the USSR are economic and geographical realities. Satellite dependence on Soviet raw materials and on Bloc outlets for finished goods of inferior quality, unsalable elsewhere, naturally gives the USSR considerable leverage, the exceptions being Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and also Albania, which has no finished goods to export and could obtain whatever she needs, more advantageously even, from less distant, including uncommitted, sources. Being a small country, Albania's credit needs are small too.

As for geography, improvements in modern means of transport, including the military, notwithstanding, distance is still a factor to be reckoned with; and the closer the Satellite is to Russia, the greater the degree of dependence.

From every point of view the Romanian and Hungarian regimes are in the worst position to manifest any velleities of greater independence. As mentioned above, the people are strongly anti-communist and anti-Russian. The Communist parties are largely composed of opportunists and their "cadres" are mediocre. In Romania, the fact that Gheorghiu-Dej has had to contend with little overt opposition from within the party - the only real threat to a communist regime under the prevailing circumstances - merely proves the party's poverty in outstanding personalities. (Lucretiu Patrascanu,

potentially the Romanian Nagy or Gomulka, was foresightedly "liquidated" in 1954). In Hungary, the weakness of the party was amply demonstrated in 1956, and the quality of the human material can hardly have changed. The comparative weakness of the communist regimes in Romania and Hungary is further attested by the continued presence of Soviet forces in Hungary, which at the same time form one arm of the pincer encompassing Romania.

The Polish regime in one sense is probably the weakest of all, for the party is woefully undisciplined and the people's natural anti-communism is stiffened by their profound Catholic faith. In addition, Russia is one of Poland's hereditary enemies. Nevertheless, in another sense, that is, from the point of view of its survival prospects, the Gomulka regime is perhaps the strongest of all, just as sickly people often outlive healthy ones. It is about the least oppressive regime the Poles can get away with and still keep the support of the Soviet Union, indispensable for the retention of the former German provinces which they now occupy. Communist China can be of no assistance in that respect.

The same factor influences the situation in Czechoslovakia, although to a much lesser degree than in the case of Poland, since the Sudentenland was never a part of Germany and the plausible accusation of wanting to recover what was hers cannot be levelled even against German "revanchists." At most the latter stand for the right of the expelled population to return to their homelands and recover their property. But since honor between thieves is one of the few reactionary principles the communists still respect, the USSR is much more likely to oppose this right than the Western nations, and the Czechoslovaks are therefore bound to think twice before antagonizing Moscow.* How much this consideration helps to explain why hostility to the communist

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* In this connection it may be recalled that an effective argument assiduously spread by the Romanian communists to reduce opposition to their takeover during the transition - with the exception of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina, of course. It is true this did not help communism in Hungary, but Romania has twice the area and the population of Hungary.

regime seems to be less strong in Czechoslovakia than in any other Satellite, is difficult to assess. The Communist Party was of course many times stronger in Czechoslovakia than in any other Satellite, even without the benefit of Russian armed protection, and Czechoslovakia being already highly industrialized and prosperous, there has been little need for belt tightening, forced labor, and other measures breeding resentment. Since the regime also had right from the start a large pool of reliable party members from which to recruit the necessary "cadre," and since the country had an old tradition of western-type administration, it is also undoubtedly efficiently administered. Whatever the reasons, Czechoslovakia has certainly become the most firmly established of all Satellite regimes and needs little, if any, outside support. Although it could doubtless go far on the road to national communism if it wanted to, it is apparently content to toe the Moscow line of its own accord.

In the position of the East German communist regime, there is a curious mixture of elements of great strength and great weakness. On the credit side, we may list the efficiency and discipline of the administrative and party apparatus characteristic of Germans, and the obvious interest of both Russians and West Germans to avoid any rocking of the boat in East Germany, which might lead to a showdown that neither of the two powers or the East German people desire at the present time. On the debit side, since it is only reasonable to assume that East and West Germans feel very much alike about these matters, we may list the violent animosity of the population toward the regime qua communists, as well as qua traitors and tools of the Russians, a people they consider half barbarous, against whom they fought two wars and who devastated their country mercilessly only a short while ago. (The fact that the German occupation of Russian territory had also been far from exemplary does not reduce German resentment. It merely explains Russian animosity toward Germans. The

parable of the mote and the beam applies to both sides in such cases). However, the overriding factor in the East German situation is the Soviet aversion to rocking the boat which, combined with the dire consequences of an armed uprising, on balance makes the Ulbricht regime very stable.

The Bulgarian regime can also be considered stable. Petkov and Kostov were liquidated in time, and Chervenkov seems to be a "paper tiger" by common consent. Bulgaria being, with Albania, the most backward of the Satellites, it has registered the greatest advance in percentage terms in the field of industrialization, and its relations with Russia, the traditional "protector," have always been of the best.* After the armistice of 1944, the Russians refrained from occupying Bulgaria and exacted no reparations. There is therefore no anti-Russian, as distinct from anti-communist, sentiment in Bulgaria. Moreover, the Bulgarian regime is in the exceptionally advantageous position of ruling a country which borders on two members of NATO and also on Yugoslavia. Such a position must incline Moscow to somewhat greater tolerance toward an occasional Seitensprung, for fear excessive severity might lead to a complete breakaway - as Stalin's did in the case of Yugoslavia, much to Khrushchev's chagrin. Zhivkov and Yugov are at least vocal in their denunciation of Tito. But the Yugoslavs take care to keep the memory of Dimitrov, who in 1947 negotiated the short-lived Bulgaro-Yugoslav Federation, very much alive.

The arcana of Albanian politics are closely guarded, and little reliable information is available as to what goes on in that country, both on the stage and behind the scene. At first sight it seems difficult to understand that the Albanians, who did not have even the rudiments of an industrial "proletariat" and who were on the other hand famous for the indomitable spirit of freedom manifested in the days of Turkish ascendance in the Balkans, should not have shaken off the

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* It is true that Bulgaria was lined up against Russia in the two World Wars, but Bulgarian and Russian troops were never made to face each other, both sides fearing they would fraternize rather than fight.

communist yoke. A Soviet military intervention would obviously be much more difficult than in Hungary, if not impossible. The explanation is perhaps to be found in the exceptional ability of Enver Hoxha, the fear of absorption by Yugoslavia, and the fact that in the absence of Soviet troops, the domination exercised by the USSR is intangible for the man in the street, while its economic assistance has been on the contrary very palpable. Whatever the explanation, Enver Hoxha and Mehmet Shehu appear to be firmly in the saddle. The geographical position of Albania obviously guarantees them a unique freedom of action, limited only by the difficulty of finding an alternate sponsor to provide the accustomed material assistance in case of a rupture with Moscow.

The picture of the situation in the Satellites outlined above is admittedly largely conjectural, but its credibility is supported by the fact that developments so far seem to fit into it. It may thus be of value in the assessment of future developments in the field of Bloc relationships.

Although there had been some earlier discordant notes in the Sino-Soviet duet, the first indication that the permanence of fundamental harmony could not be taken for granted was supplied by Moscow's disapproval of the Chinese communes, launched in the early summer of 1958, which implicitly challenged the justification of the Kremlin's leadership of the Bloc, ostensibly based on ideological primacy.

The reaction in the Satellite countries differed perceptibly from the Soviet reaction. In all of them the Chinese "great leap forward" was reported and commented upon, mostly favorably, and Bulgaria's revision of her economic plan even carried distinctly Chinese overtones. Although Moscow never formally criticized the Chinese initiative, still its lack of sympathy was obvious, and the attitude of the Satellites can therefore hardly be explained otherwise than by the feeling of most party leaders that the Chinese giant pro-

vided a protective umbrella and that here at last was an opportunity to assert some independence from Moscow, and that by a tightening rather than a loosening of the reins of government. The communes were, needless to say, largely irrelevant to the conditions in the Satellites, but the implications of the program were clear and, as mentioned above, they were bound to appeal to the majority of the party stalwarts.

The question, however, soon lost much of its acuity since the Chinese themselves backtracked a considerable distance in December 1958, a development which made it much easier for the Bulgarian regime to asseverate that any resemblance between their own and the Chinese "leaps" had been entirely coincidental. Nevertheless occasional comments in the Satellite press on the Chinese "leap forward" continued to be perceptibly more favorable and more frequent than Soviet utterances on the subject.

By the late summer of 1959, Sino-Soviet divergences on the question of hard versus soft line toward the West completely overshadowed internal ideological differences. On this issue the attitude of the Polish, Romanian and Hungarian parties was in perfect harmony with that of Moscow, as was that of the Bulgarian CP, which was at great pains to efface any impression of disloyalty that might have lingered on in the wake of the Bulgarian "great leap forward."

By contrast, in the autumn of 1959 Czechoslovakia tended to show considerable understanding for China's distrustful attitude toward the peaceful coexistence policy. Novotny was the only Satellite first party Secretary to go to Peking for the October Anniversary celebrations. But already by January 1950, Prague and Moscow were once again talking in unison.

Although East German utterances, on balance, reflected the Soviet line, the fact that almost right up to the Bucharest Meeting in June 1960, quite a few of them implicitly supported the Chinese point of view, inevitably created the impression that the hard Chinese line enjoyed considerable support. Indeed, at lower levels, the undertone is still pro-Chinese.

Officially, at any rate, any differences between Satellite CPs in their degree of sympathy with the Chinese line in matters of East-West relations were smoothed out at the Bucharest Meeting, with the notable exception of Albania. The Albanian delegate was the only one reported to have stood up for the Chinese point of view in the inter-party discussions, Enver Hoxha was the only Satellite boss not to be in attendance on Khrushchev at the United Nations Assembly meeting in September, and Albania was the only European communist country represented at the 1960 October celebration in Peking by a delegate of any distinction, Deputy Premier Abdyl Kellezi. On October 4, 1960, he declared that the Chinese "have always marched forward along the correct Marxist-Leninist line as delineated by the party and Comrade Mao Tse-tung." In their turn the Chinese, through the mouth of Chen Pei-hsien, secretary of the Shanghai CCP Committee, on October 11, stated their conviction that the "heroic Albanian people, who are not intimidated by threats of violence or afraid of hardship, have never cherished any impractical illusions about the enemy and have resolutely opposed the imperialist policy of aggression and war led by US imperialism." On the same day the arrival in the port of Durres of a ship carrying a cargo of wheat was deemed by Radio Tirana to be worth a special announcement. As it happened, it came from China - hardly a purely commercial transaction considering the distance and China's own grain shortage.

Developments so far seem, therefore, to support the hypothesis enunciated at the outset, that East European communists were, on principle, not displeased by the emergence

of Sino-Soviet divergences. But to derive any practical benefits from the situation is a very different matter and the possibilities vary considerably.

Poland, dragging the ball and chain of her raison d'état, obviously cannot under any circumstances afford to trade Russian military cooperation for intangible ideological support, however strong, and need not be considered further in this connection. In Hungary and Romania the communist parties are in too precarious a position to toy with the idea of loosening the Soviet harness. The East German and Czechoslovak parties are in stronger positions, but the Czechoslovaks really do not need Chinese support if they want to act more independently. Novotny could undoubtedly emulate Tito, if he wished to, but true to the Czech type, he and his associates apparently lack ambition and are content with the present situation. The Bulgarian leaders are probably deterred from any manifestations of a desire for greater autonomy by Bulgaria's pressing need for Soviet economic assistance, coupled with the fear of being supplanted by mushrooming adherents of a federation with Yugoslavia if relations with Moscow were to sour.

A similar apprehension may be one of the reasons helping to explain the anomaly of Albania's defiant attitude toward Moscow. The present-day leaders of Albania came to power on the crest of the wave of Stalin's break with Tito, which halted the process of absorption by her more powerful neighbor in progress at that time.* As a result Hoxha, Shehu and their friends advanced from the status of leaders of a subsatellite to that of leaders of a Satellite.[1] It is only natural

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* It might be more accurate to speak of "total" absorption, since the Kosmet district, in which about two-fifths of the total number of Albanians live, forms part of Yugoslavia.

[1] The formula is borrowed from: Albania, L. Skendi, Ed. New York, Praeger, 1956.

to assume that they do not relish the prospect of a demotion or worse, something which must appear to them as a distinct possibility in view of Khrushchev's known anxiety to achieve a reconciliation with Yugoslavia - the cost of which they well might be made to pay. Since Peking's attitude toward Yugoslavia has been on the contrary quite uncompromising, it is only natural for the Albanians to side with the distant Communist power, whose support, economic as well as moral, might be sufficient to offset Moscow's coolness. Practically, the Albanians are now independent, thanks to their fortunate geographical position which rules out direct Soviet intervention, and independence should in turn further strengthen the internal prestige of the regime. Needless to say, Albanian claims that their attitude is dictated by considerations of ideological purity need not be taken seriously.

Unfortunately for the West, the Albanian Satellite regime is the only one left (after the Soviet-Yugoslav break) fulfilling the conditions needed for a successful assertion of independence from Moscow, i.e., the inclination as well as the material possibility. Whether the Sino-Soviet rift is patched up or, on the contrary, further deepened, developments in this field are unlikely to affect Soviet-Satellite relations to any appreciable extent. Only in the possible but unlikely eventuality of an early open break between the two communist giants would it be conceivable that Moscow might resuscitate the concept of an enlarged Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which was the vogue in the 1920's, and incorporate the Satellites into the present structure, obviously for the purpose of enhancing its stature vis-à-vis other powers, primarily China. However, this move would have to be carefully weighed against the effect on the game Moscow is stalking in the neutralist woods, the quasi-certainty that the breach would become irreparable, and that China would retaliate by swallowing North Korea and North Vietnam. In China's present mood the temptation to reach out even further into

uncommitted territory might prove too strong to resist. The result might well be a war, which Khrushchev in general appears sincerely not to want, and in particular can be trusted to wish even less under the present circumstances in which he would be forced to make a truly agonizing reappraisal of Soviet policy.

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